

# The Farm Family and the Village in Japan

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(Received December, 25, 1979)

## Summary

To study the farm family we should consider it in relation to the village as a form of the local community, because a village consists of farm families combined. We can find common features between the family and the village as for their functions for human life. From this point of view we can get three types of farm families which correspond to each historical stage of Japan.

1. The communal type of family, the oldest type of farm family where the frame of the village community was relatively stronger than that of the family.
2. The 'ie' type of family, which has a character both lineal and patriarchal, was the most popular form of family in the prewar days of Japan.
3. The individualistic type of family is a new type of rural family groped by the rural people and the rural sociologists since the end of the War.

## Introduction

The Japanese farm family has a close relationship with the village. It can be said that farm families combined as a group form a village. So it can also be said that we must study the village to understand the farm family. Hitherto, the Japanese farm family if patriarchal and lineal in character has been called 'ie' and the Japanese village has been called 'mura'. The basic characteristics of rural social structure in Japan have been explained mostly by the concepts of 'ie' and 'mura'. Therefore, the main current of Japanese rural sociologists has been studying about 'ie' and 'mura' as basic concepts. But when a Japanese rural sociologist studies these two concepts, he usually places his stress upon either 'ie' or 'mura'. And another sociologist tries to explain them on the basis of quite different principles.

Thus there have been two different general theories on 'ie' and 'mura' since the beginning of modern rural sociology in Japan. One is so-called the 'ie' combination theory. According to this theory the basic unit of Japanese rural society is 'ie', and the combination or federation of 'ie' makes a 'mura' through a number of close mutual aids among them. A representative of this theory is Kizaemon Aruga<sup>1)</sup>. This theory can explain the relation between 'ie' and 'mura', but it has a weak point. The existence of the 'mura' itself cannot be perceived by this theory. It is only a ghost image.

There is another theory about 'ie' and 'mura'. This is represented by Eitaro Suzuki who is one of the founders of modern Japanese rural sociology<sup>2)</sup>. He thinks that the

accumulated social relationships or social groups within the second social circle make a village, while the first social circle makes a neighborhood, and the third social circle makes a district. This kind of village formed and lasted naturally for a long time has an autonomous and self-governing spirit, he thinks. In this theory, I think, 'mura' can be expressed vividly as a social unit. But the relationship between 'mura' and 'ie' is not so clear. Therefore 'ie' ought to be explained with different logic independent of 'mura'.

Therefore, in order to overcome the defects of these two theories we must look for a unified general theory to explain 'ie' and 'mura' and their relationship. With this purpose in mind I would like to propose the concept of human life as an intermediary between the family and the local community. We can demonstrate this when we re-examine the functions of families and local communities and the process of their development. Of course they have their own inherent functions respectively. For instance, the family has as its primary functions the regulation of sex relation and the reproduction of new members. And the local community has also such inherent functions as the allocation of its resources and equipments.

The family and the local community, however, have the same functions for human life in common.

The first of them is to provide various materials for their members to satisfy the basic needs for human life. As for the family it takes the form of getting some income for the consumption of the family members from any occupation. As for the local community it takes the form of providing some materials or jobs for each family or each individual. This idea leads to the concepts of farming or industrial structure.

Second, the family and the local community have the functions of interdependence of human life. Through this interdependence, members of the community have had mutual aid and the weak, the young, the elder and the sick have enjoyed this aid also. This idea leads to the social unit.

Third, the family and the local community are somewhat the original source of the norms and values to which their members orient themselves. At the same time they are influenced from a larger society. This can be seen as the frame of life from and to which the values of social life derives and its members orient themselves. This idea has a relation to culture or ideology. Thus we can get the following scheme. (See Fig. 1)

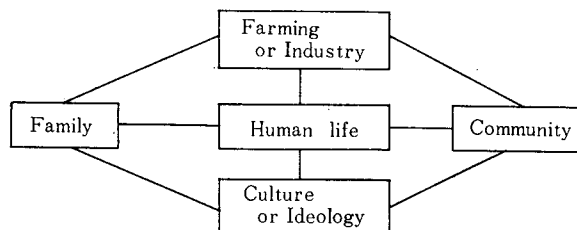


Fig. 1. Relationship between family and community

In the present time, Japanese 'ie' and 'mura' have been changing in the face of collapse. At that time we must ask what will be reconstructed after the collapse of 'ie' and

what will be becoming after the disorganization of 'mura'. Though these questions are the most important for the Japanese rural sociologists of today, there are no distinct answers to them. Thus we should not consider the 'ie' and the 'mura' directly, because these two concepts were used in a particular stage of history. In stead of the 'ie' and 'mura', I think, we should use the concepts of family and local community in a broader sense. So we should reexamine the concepts of family and local community historically in order to establish a desirable theory of change.

### (1) Development Process of the Japanese Farming

Before considering the Japanese farm family it would be necessary for us to touch on the history of Japanese farming, because the rural family has a close relation to the farming. Japanese farming has developed through the same process as Galeski's scheme from the ancient manorial estate ('shoen') to the peasant family and to the modern family farm<sup>3)</sup>.

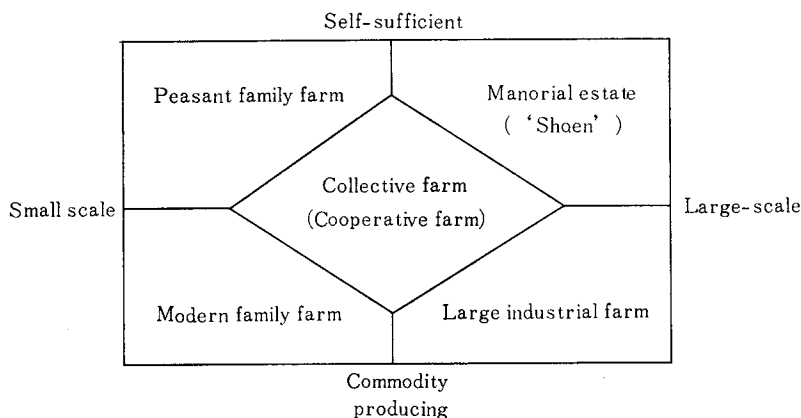


Fig. 2. Types of organizational units of agricultural production

At the end of 12th century, taking the place of the ancient aristocracy, the samurai class came to the throne, and the feudal system of shogunate was established. At that time about 14th or 15th century, the old 'shoen' system which was founded on the noble men's private manorial estates, a kind of latifundium, had been transformed and dissolved, and the village community called 'so' appeared in most developed districts near Kyoto and Nara<sup>4)</sup>. It consisted of independent peasantry and had a semi-autonomous character. This kind of village had transformed and spread to all the rural areas of Japan during one or more centuries.

In 17th century, the Tokugawa shogunate was founded as a reconstruction of the older feudal system. Under this regime, the ruling class, that is, the 'samurai' class gathered in the castle towns called 'jōkamachi', while the subordinated class, peasantry remained in village communities. This village was semi-autonomous by the peasantry itself. However, they were not allowed to leave their village communities, and they were heavily taxed.

For example, 40 percent or 50 percent of their products were confiscated. Those families who had responsibilities to pay the taxes were called 'honbyakushō'<sup>5)</sup>. This system is called 'honbyakushō' system.

In 1868, the Tokugawa shogunate collapsed. And the Meiji Era began. The Meiji Government had a characteristic of somewhat absolutism and centralism. 'Tennō', the emperor, was at the top of the system, the military forces obtained by the nation-wide conscription system were in the background and a modern bureaucratic system took charge of the administration. The slogans of the government was to create industry and to enrich and strengthen the country. At this time Japanese capitalism began to develop.

As Japanese capitalism had grown even in the rural areas from the Meiji Era to the Taisho Era, the peasants were losing their self-sufficiency and were being transformed into farmers who should produce for the market. Through this process the majority of peasants were losing their farm lands and becoming tenant farmers. Unlike them, rich farmers and marchants gathered and concentrated their land and became landlords. For instance, there were 5 gigantic landlords with 1,000 hectares and more of land in Niigata Prefecture<sup>6)</sup>. The largest landlord in Japan, the 'Homma' Family had over 2,000 hectares of paddy-fields in Sakata city and its neighborhood. In 1931 the percentage of land cultivated by tenant farmers reached 47.3 percent of all the farm land of Japan, and the percentage of the number of landed farmer was only 31 percent of the whole farmers<sup>7)</sup>.

After World War II a land reform was carried out from 1946 to 1948. And almost all the tenant farmers were emancipated and became independent owner farmers. They had a strong desire to improve their farms by utilizing new agricultural techniques, chemical fertilizers, medicines and farming machinery in order to solve the problem of the shortage of food supply common in that period of Japan. And the productivity of farming has been greatly improved.

Since about 1960, the situations surrounding Japanese agriculture have gradually changed. This is the period of so called 'high economic growth'. The gross national product of Japan has been growing more than 10 percent annually, but farm product has been growing only 3 to 5 percent. Thus the difference in relative importance between agriculture and other industries has become greater and greater. Even the principal labor power in farming such as heads or successors of farm households has flowed out from agriculture to other industries. And thus the rate of part-time farmers to whole farmers is increasing greatly, and that of full-time farmers is decreasing.

## (2) Changing Process of Japanese Village

Next we will see the development process of a village in Japan. A Japanese village can be seen as a kind of local community in which a social interaction system can give a solidarity conscienceness to the inhabitants within a given territory.

The old type of village had its own character as a village community. The Japanese village was a primary place of production and social life, and it had a high degree of closeness and exclusiveness and a self-sufficient economy. In the Edo era the village was an organization for solving common problems of the inhabitants and for realizing their

requirements. It was a somewhat constant self-governing organization. The ruling class controlled the village as a whole. Taxation and criminal investigation were left to the ruling class, who governed the whole village, because the village was a closed and exclusive organization. And within it there was much intensive mutual aid among the inhabitants. From this point, the village was also an organization for social security and welfare.

Since the Meiji Restoration in 1868, the Japanese rural village has been weakening its character as a village community, because Japanese capitalism has developed rapidly, political and administrative systems have been reformed several times and scientific technology has progressed remarkably. The closeness of the village was considered as an obstacle, both administrative and political, to the modernization of Japan. As the self-sufficiency of the village has been decreasing, commodity economy has spread into the village. As far as the degree of satisfaction of the basic needs is concerned, dependence upon the world outside the village has been increasing.

But the wall of the closeness of the village could not have been removed easily before World War II, because there remained a lot of common lands and forests and fields as the basis of village community, and because the irrigation system for the paddy-fields was controlled and maintained by the village itself or the water utilization association which was, in fact, a village agency. And the mutual aid systems in the village remained strong those days. Moreover, even the fixed class hierarchical system like the feudal system within the village still remained somewhat.

These situations have changed since after the war especially since 1960's.

The self-sufficiency of the village had decreased rapidly, and the satisfaction of the basic needs for rural life has been depended upon the world outside the village owing to the improvement of the living standards of rural inhabitants. Thus the functional correlation between rural areas and urban centers has been increasing more and more, as rural traffic services have been improved and automobiles have come to be used widely in rural areas. As the number of part-time farmers, especially commuters from rural areas to urban centers has greatly increased.

From these facts we can see the tendency that the character of the old village community as a closed compact wholeness of every day life is going to change owing to the following processes of forming a metropolitan community<sup>8)</sup>.

The first of these tendencies is the introduction of new crops in place of rice crop as the consequence of selective enlargement and the curtailment of rice crop encouraged greatly by the government. As a result there have arisen some tendencies which are regional differentiation of farm products and formation of the main productive districts.

The second of them is the increase of part-time farmers. This means the increase of the connection of agriculture and other industries in the individual household of a farm family. At the same time it also means connection of the village where they live and the city where they work.

The third tendency is the formation of a metropolitan community where people can avail themselves of such facilities as water supply, a garbage disposal plant, sewage, fire prevention systems, schools, establishments of education, entertainments and sports and

establishments of public welfare and so on. Such various facilities and establishments cannot be located within a small village, but they can be located rather in a larger community.

The fourth, we can see the necessity of formation of the metropolitan community from the reconstruction of rural associations. One of its examples is the reorganization of the system of city, town and village in about 1955. Another example can be seen in formation of agricultural study societies and producer's guilds organized beyond the boundaries of the old village.

In view of these tendencies we can say that larger metropolitan communities which combine urban centers and rural areas are going to be formed in Japan in the near future.

Besides this, we notice the reorganization process of the old village to a neighborhood community. Most of the Japanese villages are closed societies. This fact can be utilized as the smallest unit for administrative organization and location of facilities and services for social life. This becomes a basic unit of self-government for the inhabitants, even when the village community is going to disappear.

In this way, during the period of high economic growth the old village community is dissolved and reorganized to a larger metropolitan community on one hand, and a smaller neighborhood community on the other hand.

### (3) Three Types of Japanese Farm Family

Now we must turn to the Japanese farm family. The next problem is how the Japanese farm family has developed from the past to the present day, and how it will develop in the future? In order to solve this problem I will propose three types of the farm families. Before describing these types, we would like to explain my standpoints.

First, we cannot understand the rural family independently of the village and the nation, since the family shows an aspect of the social system of a larger society. At the same time the family has a character of the framework of human life which reflects the values of the members. And the concept of social framework used here means a place of life, a source of value and an object of human motivation. In this respect, we can get

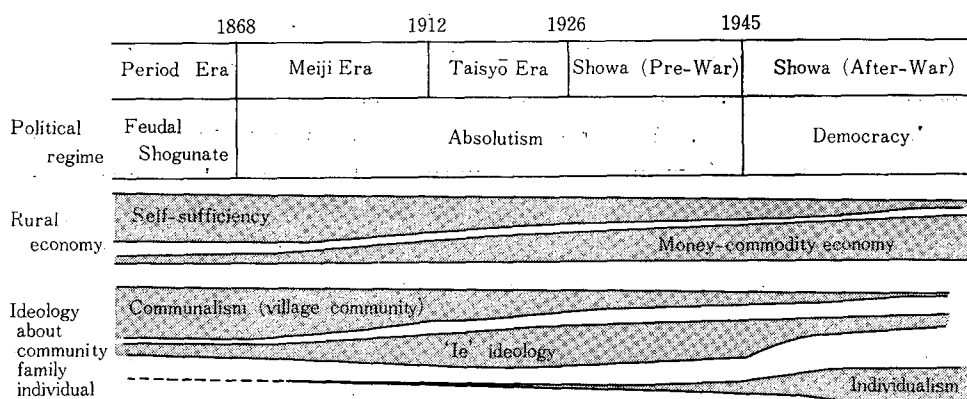


Fig. 3. Development of ideology about community, family and individual

figure 3. This figure shows that ideology about community, family and individual has changed from communalism, to 'ie' ideology and to individualism, corresponding with the political and the economic situations. (See Fig. 3).

Second, the family performs many fundamental functions for human life. And the family provides a basis for daily life and becomes a unit of life. In this sense the village provides norms and values as a social unit and social frame as well as the family and the nation do. So we can see the three basic frames of life as a social unit or social totality. These are family, village and nation. The character and degree of these frames of life may vary depending on time and place. Thus we can get three types of Japanese rural families from this point of view. This is shown in Fig. 4. In this figure the frames of life are expressed as a broken, solid and thick line according to the degree of their intensity.

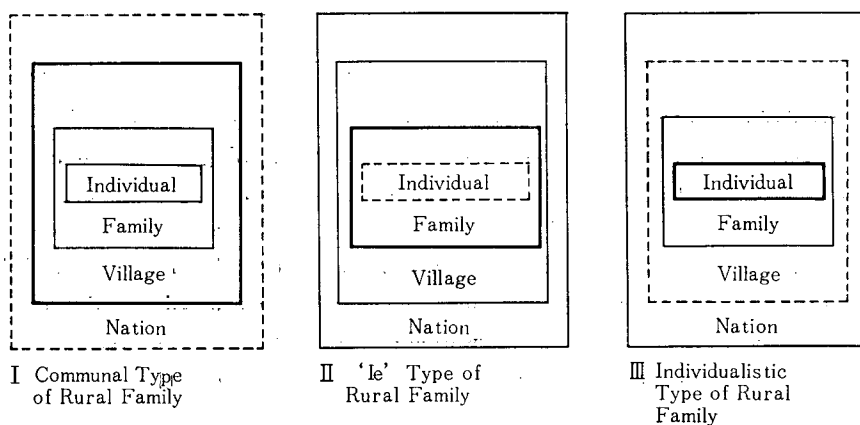


Fig. 4. Three types of rural family in relation of individual, village and nation

Third, we can get three types of Japanese rural families such as communal type of rural family, 'ie' type of rural family and individualistic type of rural family. These can exist not only spacially together, but also they can be seen historically at the same time, though these can be regarded as historical concepts. Living in a village community, the farm family had a communal character in accordance with the situations of the rural society based on such village community. Then, as the peasant farming was established on the inherited farm of family, and as the Confucianistic ideology of the samurai class was penetrating into rural areas, the idea of 'ie' and the 'ie' type of family appeared and developed in rural Japan. But recently after World War II, as democratic ideology has come into rural areas, the Japanese farm family has taken its orientation to the individualistic type of family. In this way these three types of rural families can be regarded as the historical concepts of the family<sup>9)</sup>.

Next, we should examine these three types of farm family a little more concretely.

#### 1) Communal Type of Rural Family—Farm Family of the Oldest Days—

The Japanese rural family has been often explained as a patriarchal family on the

basis of 'ie' system by rural sociologists. For instance, Eitaro Suzuki said that the lineal family was the majority of Japanese rural families. And he classified the rural family into three types only from the point of view of its construction of membership. These are the extended family, lineal family and conjugal family (or nuclear family)<sup>10)</sup>. He did not touch upon the non-patriarchal and non 'ie' families as an original type of rural family. Tadashi Fukutake has described that the patriarchal family can be seen in the upper class of farmers or in landlord families. But he regards the non-patriarchal and non-lineal families, that is non 'ie' families, only as an exceptional type<sup>11)</sup>. In spite of these views, the non 'ie' family can be regarded not as an exception, but rather an original type of Japanese rural family. I would like to elaborate this point as follows.

At first, I am going to explain the features of the communal type of rural families. The communal type of family is classified as non 'ie' family. Its features can be estimated by some presently existing rural families in remote villages like fishing villages or mountain villages. I will show its specific features.

1. The communal type of rural families has no or little hierarchical ranking among the families. For example, Susumu Isoda surveyed a mountain village in Tokushima prefecture, Shikoku district. He prescribed that in the village Kiyadaira there was no family ranking. All the members in such a highly closed village are equal in rank, and ranking or hierarchy is not so important a matter for them<sup>12)</sup>.

2. Marriages in the communal type of family do not always take a patri-local form.

Such a village of communal families had a high rate of endogamy, and had no differences in social status between man and woman. In such a village the chastity of women was not necessarily an important condition of marriage. There still persisted a custom of a kind of matrilocal or visiting marriage in such places as the Shima Peninsula<sup>13)</sup> and some islands in the Seto Inland Sea.

3. Practices of particular inheritance and retirement can be seen. In this type, primogeniture is not necessarily insisted on. There are some varieties of the practices.

Its first type is a kind of ultimogeniture<sup>14)</sup>. When a son gets married, he and his wife leave their parent's house to live in another house and thus become independent. Then the parent's house is inherited by the youngest son. This practice can or could be seen in Amakusa Islands in Kumamoto Pref., Goto Islands in Nagasaki Pref., farm villages in Kagoshima Pref. and fishing villages in Wakayama Pref.

The second type is so-called retirement<sup>15)</sup>. When the first son gets married, the parents move to another house with other sons and daughters. And when the second son gets married, the parents move once more and so on. This practice remains wide in south-western Japan to the mountain villages in the Abukuma Mountains in Fukushima Pref.<sup>16)</sup> Though this practice is called retirement, this actually means a division of the family to create a new branch family. Even in suburban villages near Osaka city the practice of creating a new branch family from the stem family is called retirement ('inkyo') even today.

As we have seen some features of the communal type of rural families are as follows:

(1) There is no or little hierarchical ranking among those families. (2) Marriages are



sometimes non patri-local, and (3) Practices of non-primogeniture and retirement are retained. Though this type of family can be seen in the remote fishing or mountain villages at present, we can see it rather as an original type of rural family in Japan.

What are the conditions of the existence of this type of family? This type of family can be seen in villages in which productivity is relatively low, other basic means of production are possessed by the village itself, and closeness and exclusiveness are very strong. Such villages entertain the ideology of communalism that the maintenance of communal order should be considered preferentially. And so we can see it as an original type of rural family in Japan, because the farming of the older days was operated by the whole village community.

## 2) The 'ie' Type of Family—Rural Family before the War—

The 'ie' type of rural family is and was the most popular and most common type in rural Japan, at least before World War II.

The 'ie' system appeared during the days of the feudal shogunate system. Under the Tokugawa shogunate system, the 'honbyakushō' is the major and core stratum within rural villages, holding responsibility to pay taxes and provide labor service to the feudal lord. According to Shinzaburō Ohishi, this 'honbyakushō' system derived from the serf or semi-slave in Mediaeval times to win to obtain the independent position of them from their master on the basis of their residences, farming instruments and some one hectare of farm land<sup>17)</sup>. As this process had been advancing, the 'ie' system was brewed step by step during the Tokugawa shogunate period.

After the Meiji Restoration Japanese capitalism started to develop. The village community was a great obstacle to the development of capitalism. The Meiji Government felt the need to connect Japanese people directly to the nation in order to advance the centralisation and modernization of Japan. To the realization of this purpose, the existence of village community was a great obstacle and enemy too.

In order to destroy the wall of village community, the Meiji Government tried to use 'ie' ideology and tried to make up the idea of fundamental national polity. That was to expand the idea of filial piety among peasants to that of loyalty to the emperor<sup>18)</sup>. Thus the 'ie' ideology which helped to connect filial piety with loyalty to the emperor had been diffused by the Government through primary education to almost all the country. As Takeyoshi Kawashima, a law sociologist, says, "The patriarchal system of the middle and lower classes of rural areas was formed up and grown up after the Meiji Era. And the 'ie' ideology had a character as the back bone of Japanese education of militarism"<sup>19)</sup>. In this way the 'ie' type of rural family appears when the village community is declining somewhat a little.

Some fundamental features of the 'ie' type of rural family are stated by Tadashi Fukutake, as follows.

"In common rural areas before World War II, the lineal and patriarchal family system on the basis of primogeniture was the most popular. In this system 'ie' as an idea inherited from ancestors to their offspring was regarded as the most important. People under such systems were required to give primary consideration to the maintenance of the

'ie'. Their social position as individuals was predetermined by the position of their family. Under this system parent-child relationship took precedence over husband-wife relationship. The latter can be regarded just as a means to maintain the continuity of the 'ie'. This explains the relatively low position of women and the cold treatment on the younger brothers received within the family"<sup>20</sup>).

Though these words told us all the things I wanted to explain about the features of the 'ie', I would like to itemize the summary of its features as follows:

1. Lineal family on the basis of primogeniture. The lineal relatives of three or more generations live together in a family.

2. Patriarchal family with the predominance of male over female. Especially the position of newly coming bride is low.

3. This system produces inevitably the relationship of the stem family (the main family) and the branch family. This group of the families is called 'dōzoku', which performs the important roles of mutual aid in the village, but there is a strict hierarchical ranking among the families that is called 'kakaku'.

4. The patri-local marriage. The spouse of marriage is chosen by the head of the family. And the intermediary of the marriage is necessarily needed. The bride removes to her husband's house after the ceremony of marriage to live together with her husband's family.

The family with these pure features as the 'ie' has not always existed in every rural area in Japan, because the village community was still strongly remained even before the war days.

### 3) The Individualistic Type of the Farm Family—Recent Tendency of the rural Family—

After World War II, the old 'ie' system was swept away at least formally owing to the enforcement of a new democratic constitution and a revision of the old civil law. The farm family could not but be influenced by these. Even if the family members live together, the family is formally registered as two families on the census register when a son gets married. And the national movement to democratize rural Japan around 1950 intended to abolish the patriarchalism of the rural family under the slogan of "do away with the remains of feudalism". Although the idea of authoritarianism common in rural Japan had been overthrown, the 'ie' system of the lineal family died hard, because farming has been operated on the basis of small farms scattered within the entire village. If a farm land might be divided to be inherited equally by all the children, the farming itself could not be maintained. In this way, the one side of the lineal family in the 'ie' system has been kept strong until present days, though the other side of the patriarchal family could not hold out soon after the war.

Quite recently, however, the time to change the old type of rural family has come with the high economic growth of Japan which started about 1955.

Thus the aspects of self-supporting agriculture have been driven away, and the fundamental labor power for farming has moved into cities or non farm industries. In the 1970's surplus of rice crop has been a severe social problem and agricultural politics have been obliged to change such as the curtailment of rice crop.

Though some full-time farmers have deepened their commodity producing characters, part-time farmers and farmers leaving farming have been increasing. Under these situations the rural family cannot but change its character to adjust to its new conditions, because part-time farming means the relative decline of the position of family farming on inherited land.

Thus, there are some movements to revise the lineal family system, and also to introduce the advantages of nuclear family on the basis of individualism. One of such movements is the father-child contract farming in Seki-cho, Ibaraki Prefecture<sup>21)</sup>. Another one is the payment system on farm products per month (a monthly salary system) under the guidance of the agricultural cooperative. And there is another movement that a three or more generation family is going to separate its farming, income and cooking between parental couple and their married children even though they live in the same residence<sup>22)</sup>.

There are many difficult family problems in Japan at present. Migration of labor power from rural areas to urban centers since 1960 has caused 'depopulation' problems such as the shortage of farm successors, of brides and of nursery for the aged remaining in rural areas. These problems tell us the lineal family of 'ie' system is coming to a crisis. Instead of it we can propose the individualistic type of farm family. But rural people and even the rural sociologists at present are groping to see what the future type of rural family in Japan will be like.

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